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Code Black takes such pains to create an authentic experience on the set that even the actors are fooled sometimes. RICHARD CARTWRIGHT/CBS

Working on Code Black is like living it for real

Medical drama based on 2013 film aims for authenticity

Code Black
Debuts Wednesday, CBS/CTV

MELISSA HANK
POSTMEDIA NEWS

Imagine being the lone Canada goose in a room full of bald eagles. Now imagine that room is the 20-by-20 foot trauma bay of Los Angeles County Hospital, an overcrowded and understaffed shuffle of blood and muscle and guts and gore.

That was Benjamin Hollingsworth's experience — give or take a few ruffled feathers — on the set of Code Black, a new emergency room drama debuting Wednesday on CBS and CTV.

"I have a very different relationship with the health system than my American castmates," says Hollingsworth, a Brockville, Ont., native who plays first-year resident Mario Savetti on the show.

"I moved to the U.S. around 2008, but I still maintain a residency in Canada, because I love Canada and the people here. But also, the health care that we are so lucky to have in Canada is not present in the U.S. at a universal level."

Based on the real-life ER featured in Ryan McGarry's like-named 2013 documentary, Code Black shines its fluorescent lights on residency director Leanne Rorish (Marcia Gay Harden), senior nurse Jenn Salander (Luis Guzman) and their new group of first-year residents.

It doesn't take long before those fresh-faced underlings realize the ER in Los Angeles County Hospital isn't your average ER, both figuratively and statistically.

The show's title — Code Black — refers to the state in which there aren't enough resources to treat the influx of patients at a given time. The average U.S. ER is in code black five times a year. Los Angeles County Hospital reaches it about 300 times a year.

"L.A. County is a county hospital, which essentially means that that's where people can go for minimal, if not completely free health care," says Hollingsworth. "We complain in Canada that we wait a long time, but their average wait time is 24 hours."

Benjamin Hollingsworth

L.A. County is a county hospital, which essentially means that that's where people can go for minimal, if not completely free health care.

Code Black's cast and crew — including McGarry, an executive producer — take pains to create an authentic experience on the set.

The show is shot in the real-life hospital's trauma bay, each medical crisis is based on a real event and the extras include actual nurses and doctors. Even the prosthetics are uncannily lifelike.

"One day they rolled in this 350-pound 18-year-old that had been shot in an artery in the neck," Hollingsworth says.

"We thought this actor was doing some method acting or something, lying completely still. Everybody was dead silent, and we slowly went up to touch him. And it was a dummy, completely rigged so I could do chest palpitations. The detail was so real."

Code Black is the first medical drama Hollingsworth has worked on. His TV credits include Blackstrom, Cult, Suits and The Tomorrow People. But he says it was Code Black's distinctive take on the medical genre that sold him on the show.

"We wanted it to be like if you were sitting in the waiting room and you see someone come rolling through, and they've just been in a car accident and you get a shiver because you know that's a life-and-death thing," he says.

"That's the moment we're striving to create — this aggressive sense of authenticity."

Gordon Ramsay offers English wine — in France

'We haven't had a riot yet,' says celebrity chef and restaurant owner

DOUG CAMILLI

Coals to Newcastle dept.: Gordon Ramsay is offering English wine at his new restaurant in Bordeaux.

Le Pressoir d'Argent opened last week, in a five-star hotel on Place de la Comédie, in the centre of town. On the carte des vins: sparkling wines from across la Manche, says the Telegraph. These include Gusbourne Estate, Coates & Seely, Ridgeview and Camel Valley.

"We had to include English sparkling wine," Ramsay told the wine mag Decanter, without explaining why. "We haven't had a riot yet."

The Telegraph reminds us that Ramsay has said he wants to "wake up classic French cuisine," which he called an "immobile monument."

Of course, this worthy task isn't cheap: at Le Pressoir the roasted veal sweetbread with Périgord truffle, violet artichokes, St. George's mushroom and Parmesan, for example, will set you back 40 euros ($60).

Time for another shopping tip from Gwyneth Paltrow. This month, her website Goop — or "goop," as she annoyingly styles it — offers a $350 US T-shirt. She suggests you buy a few.

It's a Paget Tulip Jersey Top, from the label Mother of Pearl. Bright colours, flower pattern.

"When you find the right T-shirt," the site says, "you want 17 of them in your closet. And you want them to last forever and never disintegrate."

Spotlight couple: Kate Hudson and Nick Jonas went to Disney World in Orlando, Fla., on Saturday. She attended his Orlando show that night. The next day they were brunching in Miami, TMZ reports.

"The people we spoke with who know them say they're not dating," the website explains, "but they've absolutely hooked up."

Wait! What? Didn't it used to be the other way around?

Gordon Ramsay says "we had to include English sparkling wine" at his French restaurant. He didn't say why. ANTHONY HARVEY/GETTY IMAGES

She's 36. He's 23.

Courtney Love doesn't sound heartbroken about missing her daughter's sudden wedding last weekend. Quite the opposite.

Frances Bean Cobain, daughter of Courtney and the late Kurt Cobain, married Isaiah Silva. Some say he looks like Kurt. They've been dating for five years, but few people expected this. E! News quotes Nameless Insider: "Courtney really likes Isaiah and ... is sad she wasn't at the wedding."

But notice the Lovester's Instagram post, alongside a photo of her with her current boyfriend, small-time actor James Norley. Nice hashtags: "If you think I'm sorry for being a no-show at any important events this week, think again. I was with @jamesnorley #candyface #worthfakingonanythingfor #heaven #worthit #day #bae #cancelallmyappointments #donthate #stud #jealous-much? Bwahaa"

Stay classy, Courtney.

Franny is 23. Courtney's 51. Kurt died in 1994.

After a long feud, Chris Brown has reached a deal with Nia Guzman, mother of his 16-month-old daughter, says TMZ.

The deal even specifies the baby's name: she'll be Royalty Brown, no middle name. There'll be joint legal and physical custody; Brown gets the child 12 days each month. He'll give $15,000 in back support payments, plus $2,500 a month from now on. He'll also pay for her schooling when the time comes, and for her health insurance and nannies.

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Ran Blake, Ghost Tones (A-Side Records): At 80, the intensely idiosyncratic pianist (and educator at the New England Conservatory) is influenced as much by moody film noir as by dreams. Here he comes up with 17 short pieces inspired by the great "Third Stream" (combining classical with jazz) composer and bandleader George Russell. Bookended by two stark solo versions of Autumn in New York, the tunes are here-today-gone-tomorrow snatches of oblique magic. Atmospheric sci-fi synthesizer patches and plaintive violin and horns occasionally contrast with Blake's stark, stabbing sorties — sort of like Thelonious Monk bumping into Sun Ra around midnight. A feast for the imagination.

Rüdiger Krause, A Guitar Named Carla (Jazzwerkstatt): Carla Bley, that is, the pianist, composer and big band leader who has composed some of the most sublimely simple yet subtly stimulating and slyly entertaining tunes in jazz over the last 50 years. Krause, a 44-year-old guitarist from Berlin, is deeply influenced by Bley, as well as Erik Satie and Pink Floyd. The album's prologue is a sample of Bley slowly intoning: "This piece needs no explanation." From there Krause, on acoustic and electric guitar, reimagines such enduring tunes as Ida Lupino, Real Life Hits, Escalator Over the Hill, Reactionary Tango and Musique Mechanique. The playing is embroidery of the rarest form: delicate yet robust. The final tune, Lawns, features Bley and real-life partner, bassist Steve Swallow. Late-night music par excellence.

Henry Threadgill Zooid, In for a Penny, In for a Pound (Pi): Quirky, clunky, spiky, thorny and profoundly irregular (oompah tuba as rhythm instrument) — no one has a sound like 71-year-old saxophonist-flutist-composer Threadgill. The proof is in the pudding: over 14 years, his longest-lasting band Zooid has been mixing tricky compositions with polyphonic improvisations, emphasizing almost cartoonish counterpoints. (The New York Times once called him "one of the most thrillingly elusive composers in and around the jazz idiom: a sly maestro of unconventional timbres, bristling counterpoint and tough but slippery rhythms.") Threadgill composes with bandmates in mind — Elliott Kawe (drums and percussion), Christopher Hoffman (cello), Jose Davila (trombone and tuba), Liberty Ellman (guitar) — while calmly weaving his way through the unpredictable motifs, like a kid in a candy store (that's been upturned). Heavy-duty, yes, but utterly delightful, too.

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Intensity mixes with feast for the imagination

JAZZ FROM B5

"The main goal for me in all of this was the hope that Eberhard would enjoy the evening of the premiere and that I would be able to represent at least a portion of the genuine love I have for him and his music in a way that was faithful to the standard he established throughout his amazing career. I am thrilled with the result." You will be, too; it's a desert-island keeper.

John Zorn, Inferno (Tzadik): When eternal musical transgressor Zorn reimagines the organ trio it's from your typical '50s club fare, which is where so much of the genre seems stuck. This album is somewhere between Brother Jack McDuff/Jimmie Smith and, well, heavy metal. He was inspired here by August Strindberg, the great Swedish playwright and novelist (and, as Zorn notes, alchemist and occultist). Slithering, sumptuously greasy organ (by John Medeski) combines with machine-gun guitar (Matt Hollenberg) and pummeling drums (Kenny Grobowski). Such dense intensity must be played loud.

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